New York
Theatre Critics' Reviews
1946

Volume VII, Number 5. • *Yearly Subscription $25.00* • Week of March 11, 1946

1946 PRODUCTIONS
Premieres in Other Years
Original Reviews Appeared in These Volumes

1945 Vol.

STAGE PLAY	PAGE
*Are You With It?	113
*Billion Dollar Baby	61
Brighten the Corner	74
*Carousel	226
*Day Before Spring (The)	92
*Deep Are the Roots	160
*Dream Girl	66
Dunnigan's Daughter	54
French Touch (The)	77
*Glass Menagerie (The)	234
*Hamlet	70
Home of the Brave	51
Mermaids Singing (The)	86
Polonaise	149
*Pygmalion	57
*Red Mill (The)	141
Rugged Path (The)	109
*State of the Union	102
Strange Fruit	82
*Up in Central Park	280
You Touched Me	164

•

1944 Vol.

*Anna Lucasta	143
*Bloomer Girl	118
*Dear Ruth	56
*Follow the Girls	222
*Harvey	95
*I Remember Mama	111
On the Town	45
*Song of Norway	149

•

1943 Vol.

*Oklahoma	341
*Voice of the Turtle (The)	199

•

1940 Vol.

*Life With Father	457

*Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of Mar. 11, 1946

1946 PRODUCTIONS
Premieres During 1946
Reviews Appear in This Volume

STAGE PLAY	PAGE
*Antigone	450
*Apple of His Eye	463
*Born Yesterday	466
Duchess Misbehaves (The)	456
*January Thaw	469
Jeb	446
Joy Forever (A)	493
Little Brown Jug	438
*Lute Song	459
*Magnificent Yankee (The)	477
Nellie Bly	481
*O Mistress Mine	474
*Show Boat	496
*Three to Make Ready	434
Truckline Cafe	441
Winter's Tale (The)	486
*Would-Be Gentleman (The)	490

*Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of Mar. 11, 1946

•

THEATRE OPENINGS

"Truckline Cafe"
"Little Brown Jug"
"Three to Make Ready"

Complete reviews appear in this issue

Theatre Critics' Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York newspapers

NEW YORK SUN
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN

All Reviews reproduced by permission.

Published by CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS, INC. : 235 EAST 22ND STREET, NEW YORK 10, N. Y.

"Three to Make Ready"

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

MARCH 8, 1946

= By HOWARD BARNES =

Here To Go!

TO PUT it briefly, "Three to Make Ready" is a stunning revue. The new show at the Adelphi has pace, excitement and wit. With Ray Bolger as its bright, particular star, it has dancing such as has not been seen in many a moon. Supplementing his singular grace and his irresistible antics are satiric sketches and a romantic tableau or two to give the work an infinite variety. Nancy Hamilton has made handsomely with the words, while Morgan Lewis has coined a catchy handful of tunes. Under John Murray Anderson's opulent supervision, this Stanley Gilkey-Barbara Payne production is a distinctive and delectable contribution to the season's gaiety.

• • •

The lampoons and the dances are the high spots of the show, which is right enough with a loosely articulated form. The finale to the first act, "Wisconsin" or "Kenosha Canoe," is one of the most hilarious take-offs that has come down the theatrical pike in several decades. With a bow to Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II, it clothes "An American Tragedy" in the folk song and ballet trappings of "Oklahoma" to ludicrous effect. It is not downright malicious, but it is wonderfully funny. "The Russian Lesson" and "The Story of the Opera" are less pointed in their kidding. They are shining spots in a constantly bright melange of sketches.

• • •

The fact that Bolger does not appear in the latter two numbers does not keep "Three to Make Ready" from being pretty much his show. The great dancer has never combined his nimble stepping with a rich comic talent so completely before. He can enchant one with rhythm and pantomime in "The Old Soft Shoe," take off ballroom dancing magnificently in "If It's Love," play a lovable scarecrow in "A Lovely Lazy Kind of Day" or do straight clowning in "The Sad Sack" with equal facility and delight. He even makes bathroom humor highly acceptable in a skit called "Cold Water Flat." He is the sort of fellow to have in a revue.

• • •

The acid test of the offering is the fact that it does much more than stagger along when Bolger is off-stage. Brenda Forbes is superbly amusing in the bit about some Upper Montclair women studying Russian and is nothing short of triumphant in her description, with gestures, of Wagner's "Walkure." She has a persuasive way with travesty and it stands "Three to Make Ready" in good stead. Margaret Webster's staging of Miss Hamilton's sketches is tremendously effective. Robert Sidney's routining of the dances by a small ensemble is equally imaginative. Virtually everyone is in a happy and dynamic mood in this show and there is no missing it by an audience.

• • •

The lesser performers are not to be sneezed at. Gordon McRae and Rose Inghram sing with romantic restraint. Jane Deering and Harold Lang dance together with exuberant skill and Bibi Osterwald and Meg Mundy fill in comically on more than one occasion. There is also Arthur Godfrey, of the radio, in some brief monologues, which might have been even more brief. The production is rich and right. Donald Oenslager's settings are either entrancing or properly satiric and Audre's costumes are tasteful and appropriate. T. B. MacDonald has done a bang-up job on the scenery construction, which is important. To put it briefly, "Three to Make Ready" is a stunning revue.

'THREE TO MAKE READY.'

Revue, with sketches and lyrics by Nancy Hamilton; music by Morgan Lewis; sketches directed by Margaret Webster; dances and musical numbers staged by Robert Sidney; production designed by Donald Oenslager; costumes by Audre; entire production devised and staged by John Murray Anderson; assistant to Anderson, Tom Bryson; orchestra conducted by Ray M. Kavanaugh; presented by Stanley Gilkey and Barbara Payne at the Adelphi Theater, Thursday evening, March 7, 1946. The cast includes the following: Ray Bolger, Brenda Forbes, Rose Inghram, Bibi Osterwald, Jane Deering, Althea Elder, Meg Mundy, Mary Alice Bingham, Mary McDonnell, Edythia Turnell, Candace Montgomery, Iris Linde, Gordon MacRae, Harold Lang, Garry Davis, Joe Jonson, Carleton Carpenter, Martin Kraft, Jack Purnell, Irwin Charles, Jimmy Venable, Jim Elsegood and Arthur Godfrey.

DAILY NEWS

MARCH 8, 1946

'Ray, Bolger! In '3 to Make Ready' He's High Spot of Spotty Revue

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Since Ray Bolger is one of the most engaging fellows to be found upon a stage and an extraordinary dancing humorist, "Three to Make Ready" has its high spots. A good many high spots, for Ray is working much of the time—and once in a while somebody else will come along with a performance or a sketch that helps. But the spots that aren't high just aren't, with the result that the revue which was presented at the Adelphi last night is uneven.

"Three to Make Ready" is, as surely everybody knows, the third of a set of revues by Nancy Hamilton and Morgan Lewis which began with "One for the Money." The first two, as I recall them, were smarty-pants but modest. The new one is smarty-pants on a little more ambitious scale—but perhaps not ambitious enough. It is too big to be called intimate and too intimate to be called lavish, thus finding itself somewhat awkwardly placed.

Mr. Bolger works in a bedroom sketch and a bathroom sketch; he is a salesman of women's shoes, the hero of an excellent satire on the Rodgers-Hammerstein operetta formula and Bill Mauldin's Sad Sack come to life. He is funny enough in these, but it is when he is dancing that he really tops the show. His first number, an affectionate parody of the old soft-shoe dance of the old vaudeville, is a fine example of how to win an audience.

All Ballroom Teams.

Mr. Bolger's ballroom dance number, in which he does all the white-tie stuff of all the night club teams, is admirable satire, and his scarecrow dance is the old, lovable familiar Ray, flip-flopping around and collapsing into his anguishing split.

There are several pleasant people to keep the star company—Brenda Forbes, for one, who can make sketches funnier than they really are and who does a fine job with Miss Hamilton's "Story of the Opera" sketch from "One for the Money." Miss Forbes, Rose Inghram, Bibi Osterward and Meg Mundy take part in one of the better numbers, about some East Orange ladies taking up the study of Russian in the furtherance of peace.

Arthur Godfrey, radio's sleep-destroyer, ambles casually in now and again to explain an item or two and is likable if not exactly forceful. To him goes the song I liked best, "A Lovely, Lazy Kind of Day." The other good musical number, "Barnaby Beach," has been attractively staged by John Murray Anderson. On the whole, however, Mr. Lewis' score is nothing remarkable.

Best of Miss Hamilton's sketches is "Wisconsin," in which "Oklahoma" and "Carousel" are given a ribbing. This is an American folk opera based on Dreiser's "An American Tragedy," and it has in it all the big numbers and big moments of the two Rodgers-Hammerstein hits. It's good topical satire, and the Agnes de Mille school of ballet takes a delightful drubbing.

Miss Inghram, one of the handsomest of the Broadway songstresses, does nicely by the musical numbers with Gordon MacRae, and Jane Deering and Harold Lang are an attractive dancing couple. Donald Oenslager's sets are all right, I suppose, but not particularly witty.

The New York Times

MARCH 8, 1946

THE PLAY

By LEWIS NICHOLS

Ray Bolger is a tall man, and every quarter inchof him measures a full mile in talent and easy stage personality. Unfortunately, however, even this giant of the times cannot by himself make a full show. Grant "Three To Make Ready" its Ray Bolger, and say immediately he is at the top of his form. Thereafter, the story must be different. The writers and producers of the sequel to "One For the Money" and "Two For the Show" have surrounded their star with indifferent material in almost all categories of a revue, and great as he is as dancer and comedian, he cannot keep things going alone. "Three To Make Ready" is, in short an dvery sadly, a disappointment.

The sketches are primarily the guilty ones that pull Mr. Bolger from his nimble feet. By Nancy Hamilton, they in part concern the ladies beloved by Helen Hokinson, in part have the pseudo-smartness of Noel Coward writing about the theatre; Miss Hamilton's ladies are not Miss Hokinson's, however, and Mr. Coward on actors and actresses is shorter and wittier. All of the skits are too long and none of them are funny enough, and Mr. Bolger should have no part in an item whereby he holds up a wooden receptacle for water which is a feature of the household bathroom. During most of the sketches, "Three To Make Ready" comes to a distinct halt.

The authors cannot be accused of attempting the easy in one regard; with the finale of the first act they write "The Case of Clyde Griffith" in the way Rodgers and Hammerstein would use the style of "Oklahoma!" and "Carousel." In addition to being heresy, the result is pretty much a shambles; Miss de Mille's ballets are light enough to defy parody, and the words of the tale make not too much sense. As the composer, Morgan Lewis has turned out a routine collection of songs, with only one, "Barnaby Beach," having a lilt to keep time with lively shoes. The sparkle, gaiety and carefree zest of young people on a vacation for a night in the theatre generally is lacking.

* * *

No one will be able to say that Mr. Bolger does not shoulder the world and bravely set out with it. A salute to old vaudeville days called "The Old Soft Shoe" is one of the high moments of the current theatre, for the actor has the right degree of humor, the right friendly attitude—as well as the steps. He is in a number of sketches, making his moments dry and expressive, and he does a burlesque of ballroom dancing in a night club which is second only to his "Old Soft Shoe." In some of the skits he is not too happy, notably one based on "The Sad Sack," but Mr. Bolger being right in all things, the fault must lie elsewhere.

Of the others, they mainly are attractive and all are willing. Rose Inghram and Gordon MacRae sing several of the songs; Jane Deering and Harold Lang help Mr. Bolger with the dancing. Brenda Forbes, a wry lady with the air of Beatrice Lillie, is the chief comedienne, and when the material is in her favor she can be funny. Comediennes always are at the mercy of others, however, and sometimes in "Three To Make Ready" the road is hard. John Murray Anderson was the general, over-all director, with Robert Sidney staging the dances and Margaret Webster, on leave from the Bard, directing the sketches. Donald Oenslager's settings are cheerful, Audre's costumes bright. But the show as a whole does not dance in Mr. Bolger's steps.

Journal and American

MARCH 8, 1946

'3 To Make Ready' On Adelphi Stage

By ROBERT GARLAND

If Ray Bolger were not so very, very good, "Three to Make Ready" might seem a whole lot better than it does. For it is Mr. Bolger who, by the shining professionalism of his performance, rids the new Nancy Hamilton-Morgan Lewis revue of its otherwise engaging amateur aspect and places it among the run of Broadway song-and-dance shows.

Almost everything about this successor to "Two For the Show," which, in turn, was the successor to "One For the Money," is amateur in aspect. Almost everything but its dancing star. And, when given even half a chance to beat about the ballet, the Harold Lang who, as we balletomanes remember, is also no slacker as a dancer.

The rest, despite the personal appearance of Brenda Forbes, Rose Inghram, Bibi Osterwald, Gordon MacRae, and the professional likes of them, is no more than collegiate entertainment. In the pre-atomic days of, say, the Mask and Wig and Paint and Powder Clubs, the boys who would be boys and the boys who would be girls did every bit as well.

They did every bit as well with pretty much the same material—the bedroom scene after Noel Coward; the Romeo-Juliet scene after William Shakespeare; the seaside scene after the man named Legion and the burlesque musical-comedy scene after the Rodgers and Hart who, in their "Garrick Gaieties," did what "Kenosha Canoe" tried to do last evening.

* * *

Soft Shoe Stuff

This same material is sometimes charming, but always amateur, until Ray Bolger and his dancing come along. Although they appear, if fleetingly, in "Post Mortem," in which Mr. Bolger and Miss Inghram share a bedroom, and "Shoe on the Other Foot," in which Mr. Bolger and Miss Forbes share a shoeshop, it is not until the seventh interlude.

Well, Ray Bolger, his feet and his part of "Three to Make Ready" do not strike their professional stride until "The Old Soft Shoe" is, as you might say, sung, and danced by Mr. Bolger, the jitterbugs who are Mary MacDonnell and Jack Purcell, and the samba-bugs who are Mary Bingham and Joe Jonson. There, and then, the amateurism flees.

This "The Old Soft Shoe" is, perhaps, reason enough for a visit to the Adelphi. But, while you are there, "Barnaby Beach," sung by Gordon MacRae and Althea Elder, danced by Jane Deering and Harold Lang, is worth waiting around for. And, if the gentleman does not scorn the word, so is Arthur Godfrey's rendition of "A Lovely Lazy Sort of Day."

Mr. Bolger is in on this "Lovely Lazy Sort of Day," too, reviving the Scarecrow routine he borrowed from Fred Stone. Then, later in the evening, he pretends to be The Sack in the "Sad Sack" number he borrowed from a certain Sergeant Baker. Finally, he is just Ray Bolger. But most professionally. Mr. Bolger never goes amateur in 54th st.

* * *

Semi-Pro Revue

What remains are the non-professional words supplied by Nancy Hamilton and the non-professional tunes supplied by Morgan Lewis. In the mouths and throats of Ray Bolger's, and Harold Lang's, surrounding performers, these stubbornly maintain their amateur aspect. Not even the fine professional John Murray Anderson has been able to professionalize them.

Bibi Osterwald, who delighted me last season by appearing in "Sing Out Sweet Land" and undelighted me the other afternoon by not appearing in the Equity Library Theatre in 125th st., has little to do and does that little casually. Jane Deering dances as if she meant it, with Mr. Lang. And Rose Inghram sings as if she had never heard of Jan Kiepura.

Running through the sketches is a Garry Davis who, from time to time, is seen, heard and found admirable as Stage Manager, Alexandre Bernier, Yellow Belly and a Sergeant who finds the Sad Sack no more amusing than I do. This Garry is, I think, Meyer Davis' offspring. He has much that is good to give to the professional theatre...

To conclude this as-enthusiastic-as-possible appreciation, "Three To Make Ready" demands more from its players and playgoers than it is prepared to give them in return. Its songs, its stories and its sayings are as amateur as its stars, its scenery and its setup are professional...Ray Bolger is it. It is Ray Bolger. The whole show is up to him—and you!

New York Post

MARCH 8, 1946

'Three to Make Ready' Stars Ray Bolger at the Adelphi

By VERNON RICE

Way back when, there was "One for the Money." Later there was "Two for the Show." And now there is "Three to Make Ready."

If you can retrace your steps back to the palmy days when there was little money, but no black clouds; when all we had to think about was how to recover from the depression, there was a thing called a revue.

It was generally filled with handsome men and pretty girls, slight satiric sketches, tuneful music, a star or two and scenery and costumes that varied from breath-taking to adequate.

Over all was an evening of fun, an evening of laughs, a couple of hours in which you could escape all the misery in the world and hold hands with your best girl.

Such an evening returned last night. It is to be found at the Adelphi Theatre.

Because that kind of an evening is so desperately needed right now, the show may have seemed much better than it actually is. That, however, is highly questionable. Under any conditions, "Three for the Money" would be a swell show.

For one thing, the musical has Ray Bolger as star. The man not only can dance but he has developed into a first-rate comedian. Not that he wasn't funny in such things as "Life Begins at 8:40" and "On Your Toes," but in this he is tops.

He appears in a devastating satire on Noel Coward in "Post Mortem," in another, which should stop the Theatre Guild from adapting any more of their successes into musicals, entitled "Wisconsin, or, Kenosha Canoe," and he brings the curtain down as well as the house as Sgt. George Baker's Sad Sack trying to get on a boat and home.

Appears With Forbes

He also is with Brenda Forbes in a skit or two and does his famous dance from "The Wizard of Oz," about which nothing more can be said.

Brenda Forbes needs some space all to her own, and that she will get. Miss Forbes can be the lady trying to give a Russian lesson, or one trying to tell the story of the opera (the same sketch that appeared in "One for the Money") or just walking across the stage, and she will choke you with laughter. She isn't just a comedienne, she's a one-woman clown.

She knows the secret of timing, so all important to anyone who wants to be funny, and just by arching her little finger at the right moment, or lifting an eyebrow, she can bring the laughs that will be heard to Hoboken and back.

These two are not alone. Among the cast are Gordon MacRae, Rose Ingham and Althes Elder to sing the songs, Jane Deering and Harold Lang to dance, Meg Mundy and Bibi Osterwald to look attractive and help on the sketches and Arthur Godfrey to wander in and out.

Nancy Hamilton, who did the sketches and lyrics, and Morgan Lewis, who wrote the music for the show's two other predecessors, were responsible for the same chores in this. They outdid themselves, if possible, in "Three to Make Ready."

John Murray Anderson was on hand to supervise again, giving the revue his usual gloss and sheen. Margaret Webster forgot the classics for the moment and staged the sketches. Robert Sidney did the dances and musical numbers, and eye-filling sets and costumes were devised by Donald Oenslager and Audre, respectively.

It's a handsome, giddy affair. It's a solid hit.

Wilella Waldorf, The Post's drama critic, is ill.

New York World-Telegram

MARCH 8, 1946

'Three to Make Ready' Tries, but It's No Go

By Burton Rascoe

Ray Bolger, that beloved and unique genius of tap, soft shoe and eccentric dancing, is back in town after too long an absence to suit this devotee of his art. He is the star and practically the only thing in it—of the third of a series of musical revues by Nancy Hamilton (sketches and lyrics) and Morgan Lewis (music) which began with "One for the Money" in 1939 followed by "Two for the Show", the next season.

The new item is called "Three to Make Ready." It is an intimate revue of a careless and semi-amateur nature.

The audience's welcome to Mr. Bolger when he first appeared last night was a tribute to his popularity; but it was polite rather than overwhelming. For he was first disclosed in a wide, pink bed with Rose Ingham. We would have preferred for him to come out dancing. The sketch was a dismal one with a tasteless double entendre. Mr. Bolger and Miss Ingraham—the romantic leads of a play—the author, a bell-boy, the manager and the critics were all agreed that they were MAH-vellous last night.

But when Mr. Bolger appeared solo in the seventh item on the bill and sang and danced "The Old Soft Shoe," we all went crazy. Mr. Bolger gave us everything he had—and that is a kind of generosity that leaves you quivering with gratitude. There will be many tender palms today, my own among them. An ermined dowager near me gave vent to an ear-piercing whistle and there were animal-like shrieks of delight mingled with other rackets delicious to a performer's ears. If that is what is called ovation, Mr. Bolger got one that will be the talk of Shubert Alley for months to come.

Plenty of Talent, But . . .

It pains me to record that everything after that was anticlimactical, including Mr. Bolger's five subsequent appearances. For we were just waiting for Mr. Bolger to show up again while dreary, tawdry and amateurish sketches followed one after another. Even when Mr. Bolger showed up (except for a kind of revival of his straw-man dance from "The Wizard of Oz") he was caught in the undertow of as dull and tuneless a set of skits as you have heard since the talent boys of your high school threw together a sophisticated little musical satire on the follies of the day.

There is talent aplenty in the show—Brenda Forbes and Bibi Osterwald top-notch comediennes; Harold Lang and Jane Deering, who have charm and personality and can dance with great skill; Rose Ingraham and Gordon MacRae, who can warble melodiously. There are ballet dancers, male and female, who are well-chosen for looks, voices, postures and precision steps. But the comics are given shoddy, even reprehensible, material to work with; the dance figures are run-of-the-mill; the songs are without lilt and are easily forgettable; and the over-all effect, including costumes and scenery, is on the pinch-penny and careless side.

In short, sketches, lyrics, music and production are all a pretty sorry mess for Mr. Bolger to be the star of. But what a thrill he is as a musician, a comedian, a satirist and an artist, not only with his feet but with every nerve of his body and every muscle of his face!

****

The Sun

MARCH 8, 1946

'Three to Make Ready,' Adelphi Revue, Has Freshness—and Also Ray Bolger.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

The long-suffering Adelphi Theater had somewhat better luck last night, coming up with a rather lively show—"Three to Make Ready," the season's first revue, put on by Stanley Gilkey and Barbara Payne. Ray Bolger is in it and he's in extraordinarily good form.

A very spotty revue, this "Three to Make Ready," but one with considerable life and freshness. The musical numbers are nicely staged, the production is attractively costumed and the score is fair, but without any outstanding tunes. The show is weak in its sketch material. Several of the sketches are dreadfully tedious and don't deserve to be in anybody's revue.

The big asset at the Adelphi is, of course, Ray Bolger. The limber, long-legged Bolger, of the grin, the grimace and the acrobatic eyes, is quite a droll fellow to have around and he manages to stay in good humor all evening, notwithstanding some of the heavy-going interludes in which he participates. He dances wonderfully and his show-stopping number comes along when he goes into his soft-shoe routine.

The first half of "Three to Make Ready" is far better than the second. There is an elaborate first-act finale, "Wisconsin" or "Kenosha Canoe," a song-and-dance version of "An American Tragedy," done as a burlesque of the Theater Guild's whopping hits, "Oklahoma" and "Carousel." It comes off effectively. Another first-half number, "Barnaby Beach," is pleasant and pictorial and is nicely done by Gordon MacRae and Althea Elder, with the dancing by Jane Deering and Harold Lang.

Brenda Forbes is funny in the sketch, "The Shoe On the Other Foot," and again in "The Russian Lesson." Bibi Osterwald, to be remembered from "Sing Out, Sweet Land," refuses to be overpowered by her material. Jane Deering dances attractively all evening and Rose Inghram is vocally excellent. Arthur Godfrey, from out of radio, wanders about rather helplessly. Good sketches are always scarce in the revue field, but it's difficult to believe that the producers can't improve on such fragments as "Cold Water Flat" and "Post Mortem."

Donald Oenslager has done well with the backgrounds and so has Audre with the costuming. The production was staged under the general supervision of John Murray Anderson. Margaret Webster staged the sketches.

"Three to Make Ready" is a revue of definite shortcomings, but you will have a pleasant time with a lot of it, particularly in its first half. And you will like Ray Bolger. Without him the cause would be completely lost.

PM Exclusive

MARCH 10, 1946

—*Kronenberger*—

Even Bolger Is Not Atlas

PM Reviews

Ray Bolger, who is a superb dancer, hasn't been on Broadway in quite a while; and neither has an intimate revue, which is always an engaging idea. Both absentees are with us again in *Three To Make Ready*, and I wish I could welcome them back as I had hoped to. But the truth is that *Three To Make Ready* is a very disappointing evening, and that even in a season when one has stopped being over-choosy about musicals, this one is still not good enough.

Certainly the fault is not Bolger's. His dancing is as adroit and delightful as ever. His comedy personality, if not quite topnotch, remains exceedingly pleasant. He does everything he can to be useful and funny, from singing a song to literally holding up with his bare hands the box of an old-fashioned water closet. He gives us, indeed, one of the great things of the past few seasons when he does a soft-shoe routine with amazing skill, and at the same time parodies it with infinite humor.

Nor, with one or two exceptions, is what goes on the fault of the other performers. Harold Lang, on Broadway, is not doing the kind of brilliant solo dance he did for the ballet in *Fancy Free;* but his dancing is all to the good. Brenda Forbes can be amusing in a droll, toplofty way. Rose Ingraham and Gordon MacRae look nice and sing nicely; Jane Deering is pleasant and Bibi Osterwild helpful. The trouble lies with what most of these people are given to do—or not given to do. The trouble lies with the music, which is ineffectual; with the sketches, which mostly fall flat; with the scheme of the show, which is really too elaborate for an intimate revue, and too special and "sophisticated" for any other kind.

• • •

Nancy Hamilton's earlier revues, *One For the Money* and *Two For the Show*, were fairly upsy-downsy and uneven affairs, but in their better moments really zestful and witty; and they disarmed you by their potluck, we-do-all-our-own-housework informality. Here, however, the dishes are passed by liveried footman, and you can't help being twice as sniffy about what you're given to eat. Barring Bolger's dancing, only one event all evening really comes off: a charmingly staged song-and-dance number called *Barnaby Beach*. On a couple of occasions Miss Hamilton has hit on amusing ideas and worked up some amusing chatter—but each time she hasn't known when to stop. For the rest, she has fallen back on inspirations like the aforesaid water closet. Among other mistakes in the show is a recurring radio character named Arthur Godfrey, and—to my mind—a long production number called *Wisconsin*, a burlesque-without-bite of *Oklahoma!* and *Carousel*. The only fun it provides comes entirely, I think, from your recognizing what things in the original are being burlesqued.

Not to end on too unfairly sour a note, let me put in a word for some of Audre's costumes and Donald Oenslager's sets, and let me repeat that Mr. Bolger is a very shining asset to *Three To Make Ready*. Unfortunately, even he is not quite enough of one.

—LOUIS KRONENBERGER

New York

Motion Picture Critic's Reviews

Now Available

Complete 1944 Volume...$25.00

Complete 1945 Volume...$25.00

Subscription 1946 Year..$25.00

"Little Brown Jug"

The Sun

MARCH 7, 1946

'Little Brown Jug,' Offered at the Beck, Loosely Written, Very Mild Thriller.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

"Little Brown Jug," the new play by Marie Baumer, offers a rather fascinating principal character, a pathological study, and it gives some promise in its early moments of shivers and suspense, but it becomes dawdling as it goes along and it is loosely written for most of the way. Courtney Burr brought the production into the Martin Beck last night.

Here's a story of a homeless and somewhat demented handy man and gardener who comes to dominate by blackmail the lives of a woman and her daughter after he has witnessed the accidental death of the girl's drunken husband in a fall from a window. The eccentric Ira forces them to take him to live with them in Connecticut and there, as an unwanted guest in the house, he disrupts things generally. He closes in on them and has them completely terrorized until the arrival of the dead man's brother. Eventually, the combination of brother, mother and daughter comes to be too much for Ira, but he gave them quite a battle, at that.

Ira, you see, had seen the mother strike the accident victim just before he toppled from the window and he holds the two women in his power by his threats. But as Miss Baumer's play is written its people are never quite believable in their helplessness and you feel that mother and daughter would have shoved Ira out of several windows before putting up with all they do. And then, too, "Little Brown Jug" is weak at the finish.

The play has to its advantage an excellent characterization from Percy Kilbride. He is the Ira, the Ira of the whine and the drawl—sly, wizened, slow-moving, menacing and seemingly, for most of the time, quite batty. It is quite the best performance this ever-working actor has given in the New York theater.

Arthur Margetson is bland and worldly as the brother who comes from afar to investigate the strange death at the boathouse and who finally catches up with Ira. Marjorie Lord is pretty and tense in the rather trying role of the daughter and Katharine Alexander strives to bring realty to the role of the mother, who submits to subjugation at the hands of the hired man. Gerald Savory has directed. Frederick Fox contributed two nice settings.

There is some rather tricky and ingenious stuff in Miss Baumer's play, but it is too loose, too lacking in credibility. "Little Brown Jug" is a very mild thriller.

"LITTLE BROWN JUG," by Marie Baumer, at the Martin Beck Theatre. Produced by Courtney Burr; directed by Gerald Savory; settings and lighting by Frederick Fox.

THE CAST

Irene Haskell	Katharine Alexander
Henry Barlow	Ronald Alexander
Carol Barlow	Marjorie Lord
Ira	Percy Kilbride
Lydia	Frieda Altman
Michael Andrews	Arthur Franz
Norman Barlow	Arthur Margetson

SYNOPSIS— Act I: Scene 1. Henry Barlow's combined lodge and boat house in Maine. A late March evening, 1945. Scene 2. Irene Haskell's house in Connecticut. Afternoon in early May. Act II: Scene 1. The same, a few weeks later. Early afternoon. Scene 2. The same, a few hours later. Act III: The same, a few hours later still.

New York World-Telegram

MARCH 7, 1946

Gags Destroy Creepy Mood of Thriller

'Little Brown Jug' Might Have Attained Real Feeling of Dread

By Burton Rascoe

I haven't seen the original script of Marie Baumer's "Little Brown Jug," which opened at the Martin Beck last night, but enough came through the lamentable staging of the play to make me suspect that what was originally a soundly conceived psychological thriller—creepy, pulse-quickening and frightening—was turned into a lifeless fiasco by a misguided attempt to play the shocker for laughs.

The result was neither anything to make you sit forward in your seat and share the terror of two frightened women in the power of a soul-destroying maniac nor anything that can be classified as a jolly evening. The mood of sinister apprehension was no sooner established than it was destroyed by stock gag lines from movie farce. The two women victims of Percy Kilbride's evil machinations never seemed to be in any real fear of the vampire, and actually there was no reason for them to be, for Mr. Kilbride was constantly alternating from his role as a menace to his more familiar role as a movie comic.

Mood Is Broken.

If those responsible for the play had remembered the mounting tension of "Angel Street" they would have learned that laughs are fatal to such a play as "Little Brown Jug" and that the mounting mood of suspense must be continuous. Break that mood ever so little and you lose your hold on the audience; break it constantly, as was done in the "Little Brown Jug" last night, and your play is done for.

The story tells of how a maniacal derelict fastens himself upon a widow and a daughter, destroys their will through fear and forces them to accede to every suggestion he makes. He has been an unseen witness to a quarrel between the daughter and her drunken husband in a boat house, at the climax of which the mother slaps the drunkard, causing him to lose his balance and fall out the window to his death. The derelict keeps reiterating, "You hit him, didn't you, and he died? You said you wanted to kill him, didn't you? That's what I would have to tell the police. You wouldn't want me to lie, would you?"

Climax Frustrated.

He proposes to go live with them and keep his mouth shut. Once in the house, he becomes the master of it, driving away cook, friends, neighbors and keeping the women under his domination. For a coroner's jury has brought in a verdict that the death was accidental. The mother (Katharine Alexander) had perjured herself as a witness declaring that she and her daughter (Marjorie Lord) were at home when the death occured.

How these evil doings are finally brought to an end is something that the ethics of my trade forbids me to disclose. But I can tell you that is hardly worth waiting for because the play has gone to pieces before it is reached.

Arthur Margetson brings his ingratiating presence into the play, but even he is given lines extraneous to the theme and inimical to the mood. Two players, both of them bit players and not featured—Frieda Altman and Arthur Franz—gave much credibility and interest to their roles.

The New York Times

MARCH 7, 1946

THE PLAY

By LEWIS NICHOLS

Marie Baumer's "Little Brown Jug" is a psychological melodrama, a class of play that is subject to all the normal hazards of the theatre as well as a few special ones of its own. Depending on character, it requires sure development or it collapses; it must be logical and believable or it is lost. In her current play, Miss Baumer has a good idea for a psychological study, but she fails to carry it out. "Little Brown Jug," being based on an illogical premise, is not believable, nor is its leading character well-drawn. The combination of two failures gives an evening that is generally pretty slow and without many surprises.

• • •

"Little Brown Jug" happens to be a phrase from a song being played when Henry Barlow, a drunkard and worse, is slapped by his mother-in-law and falls to his death from an open window. When the woman and her daughter are about to report the accident to the police, a neighborhood handyman arrives to say that if they do he will charge murder. They take him into their home, which presently he is running—getting rid of the cook and their friends, trying to warn off the new widow's new suitor. Henry's brother eventually puts in an appearance, corrects the family's mistake and straightens out life in general.

"Little Brown Jug" is incredible from the start, the obvious point being that even the police would take the word of two persons against that of one. At no time thereafter can an audience feel much sympathy for or belief in the two women; all they have to do is reach for the telephone. The handyman is not made out as a figure dangerous enough physically to hold them; Miss Baumer offers indications that he is insane, and had they—or the playwright—wished to turn him in, they could have done so. Miss Baumer shies away from making the man a developed personality, either straight or warped. "Little Brown Jug" becomes to all intents and purposes simply a play and a group of characters who stir around in a vacuum.

Percy Kilbride is back in town in the role of the handyman. With a reputation built on an excellent series of dry, singular sons of misfortune, he shows in "Little Bown Jug" he can go much farther. He has a low, easy delivery, which in the best psychological melodrama could become the subdued rattle of a snake. Unfortunately for everyone, however, he runs into the weaknesses of the character and plot; while he, himself, is good, the play is not. Arthur Margetson gives a good performance at the returning brother, and Katharine Alexander and Marjorie Lord are the mother-in-law and young widow. Courtney Burr produced, with Gerald Savory directing and the Martin Beck the theatre; Frederick Fox has offered a cool setting for what is a little too cool an evening.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

MARCH 7, 1946

= By HOWARD BARNES =

"Ira the Terrible"

A PSYCHOLOGICAL melodrama has been accented with neat touches of macabre humor in "Little Brown Jug." The result is a singularly disarming and diverting show. The new Martin Beck offering is as contrived as a crossword puzzle, but Courtney Burr has seen to it that it has symmetry, suspense and cumulative excitement. The antic Percy Kilbride contributes a brilliantly terrifying portrayal of Ira, a psychoneurotic, of all things. He is ably abetted in the criss-crossing of the plot by Arthur Margetson, Katherine Alexander and the others in the cast. In its particular idiom "Little Brown Jug" is altogether superior entertainment.

• • •

Marie Baumer asks for considerable tolerance in the major premise of her script. She places a nice mother and daughter in an intolerable jam, as a loony blackmailer moves in on them and almost destroys their home and happiness. Once one accepts the situation, which is not too hard to take in what is frankly a thriller, the piece steadily builds to the final curtain. On the way, it conjures up a deal of sinister amusement. Unquestionably, crafty acting and Gerald Savory's adroit direction make the play look much better than it actually is, but that is a prerogative of melodrama producing.

• • •

Kilbride is certain to startle those who have known him in slow-spoken comic roles. He gets laughs on more than one occasion in "Little Brown Jug," but they are of the nervous variety. On the whole, he is peculiarly frightening as he hounds a couple of women for no more ransom than affection and security. In one or two scenes he achieves a pathological intensity that places the performance well above an exercise in melodramatics. It is a genuine tour-de-force, which, in itself, makes the show well worth seeing. Margetson, who pits his wits against his, in the role of the man the victims least expected to befriend them, is splendid. His nonchalance forms an engrossing counterpoint to Kilbride's savage meekness.

• • •

Miss Alexander is as accomplished as ever in the part of the mother who gets herself involved in a tortuous situation. Her scene of hysteria, when she thinks herself completely at the mercy of a blackmailing vagrant, is a model of restrained acting pyrotechnics. Marjorie Lord is attractive as the daughter and Arthur Franz is properly frustrated as the latter's suitor. "Little Brown Jug" hews to a conventional pattern, but it is embellished no end by fine execution.

PM EXCLUSIVE

MARCH 8, 1946

—Kronenberger—

The Jug Needs To Be Chilled

PM Reviews

Little Brown Jug is one of those small offerings that don't merit kind words or call for harsh ones. It makes an agreeable try, but it doesn't come off. It is what is generally termed a psychological thriller — though what's chiefly wrong with it is that it lacks sound psychology and is very lean on thrills. Miss Baumer has also, after her first act, been pretty lax about maintaining the right mood for this kind of exhibit; there is too much casualness and too much mild comedy.

The play opens with a woman slapping her drunken son-in-law, who loses his balance and topples through an open window to his death. It is all quite accidental, but an itinerant handyman who has looked on unseen now threatens to accuse the woman of murder unless she and her daughter take him into their home. The distraught women finally agree; and the deceptively mild Ira gets a stranglehold on them, runs their life and ruins their happiness. Ira seems at first a kind of bumpkin sadist or oafish Iago, but presently emerges as unmistakably off his chump. Not to tell too much of the story, it takes the dead man's even-keeled brother to smoke out the truth and wind things up happily.

• • •

Both the premise and the development of Miss Baumer's story are a little hard to swallow; and her Ira, I must say, is a little peculiar, even for a madman. But one never tends to be too fussy about this kind of thing, provided it pays off in excitement; after all, even the tragic snarl in an *Othello* could be cleared up by 10 minutes of common sense. *Little Brown Jug*, however, is hardly more exciting than it is plausible. Though one is always mildly interested in what Ira will do next, what he does becomes less and less menacing, and even a little comic. The right macabre touch is missing; as is the right amount of tension, partly because Miss Baumer has only a situation and not a plot, partly because she keeps shattering her mood.

The production is hardly more than adequate. Several of the minor roles are played too stiffly. As Ira, Percy Kilbride—stepping aside from comedy parts—turns in a careful performance and holds you by his own personality, but is far from ideal in the role. Arthur Margetson, as the dead man's lively, chipper brother, gives the play a lot of good-humored animation; but what it most needs is just the opposite. It needs suspense and thrills.

—LOUIS KRONENBERGER

DAILY NEWS

MARCH 7, 1946

Percy Kilbride a Sinister Delight In a Thrill Play, 'Little Brown Jug'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

You must meet Ira. Ira is a skinny, horse-faced, dead-pan Maine Yankee with a very strict code of morals. He blushes if anybody employs the usual seven-letter word for a child of sin in the presence of ladies. He is rather lonely and pathetic and he has wanted to be part of a family and look out for someone all his repressed little life.

Ira gets his chance to move in and become the protector of a household in "Little Brown Jug," which was presented at the Martin Beck last night by Courtney Burr. The result is a hit for Mr. Burr and the role of his lifetime for Percy Kilbride.

You have seen Mr. Kilbride in lots of plays and movies. He wanders in when a laugh is needed, looking quaint and speaking always with a Down East twang like a perpetual caretaker of Baldpate Inn. Now Mr. Kilbride is Ira in "Little Brown Jug," and Ira is the main man in a play and not a character part. Ira, for all his moral code and his yearning for affection, is no comedian, but a very sinister fellow in a taut, crafty and thoroughly well-staged melodrama.

No Fireworks.

There is not much one should tell about the plot of "Little Brown Jug," for it is quite a simple story and it does not end in a great big lot of noise in which Ira goes mad or is dragged away by the constables. When it is time for the audience to go home Ira just walks out, quietly and in a deeply injured manner, and I suppose he will start looking for some other nice family he can attach himself to, like a wandering mutt dog.

The play starts out with a killing, but it is accidental. A woman and her daughter have gone to the lodge and boat house of a young drunkard in Maine, to ask the young drunkard to consent to a divorce from the daughter. In a family squabble Mamma slaps her tipsy son-in-law and he topples out a big window and becomes a corpse. It is something that might happen to anybody and nobody would think much of it—but Ira, a jobless handyman, happens to have holed up in an upper bunk of the boat-house and he has seen the whole row.

Ira Moves In.

Ira tells the frightened women he would hate a police investigation, because then he'd have to tell what he saw and heard. "You hit him," he says quietly to Mamma, "and he's dead." He would much rather go with Mamma and her pretty daughter to their place in Connecticut and be their gardener. They don't need a gardener, but he persuades them he'd better go anyway.

The rest is slow torture for the women and deliberate but firm tension for the audience. Ira, in his quaint Yankee way, takes over. He moves the dinner hour up from 7:30 to 5 because he gets hungry at 5. He is always bringing in bouquets or strawberries and is invariably quiet and kind. He's as crazy as a loon but it hardly shows at all.

Marie Baumer wrote "Little Brown Jug"—the title has small relation to the play—and wrote it well. Its step is quiet, but steady, and it has humor of a good, New England sort. Gerald Savory has directed it skillfully, so that nobody suddenly cuts loose with a lot of acting.

Mr. Kilbride is admirable, as you may have gathered. Katherine Alexander as the distraught mother, Marjorie Lord as the equally worried and very handsome daughter, Arthur Margetson as a breezy visitor who finally persuades Ira to go away and Michael Franz as a young lover—these are all first-rate people for a melodrama. The settings by Frederick Fox are good, too.

Journal American

MARCH 7, 1946

'Little Brown Jug' At the Martin Beck

By ROBERT GARLAND

"Little Brown Jug" isn't a very good play. It isn't a very bad play, either. As a matter of straight-from-the-theatre truth-telling, the work which came last night into the Martin Beck—the playhouse, by the way, is far too big for it—isn't very much of a play at all. What Marie Baumer has written this time is a half-hearted psychological novelette told in dialog. And at no inconsiderable length.

Our Miss Baumer, whose "Town Boy," "Penny Arcade," "Creeping Fire," "Seen But Not Heard," with Martin Berkeley, and with Nicholas Soussanin and W. J. Perlman, "House of Remsen," is no literary lady to use one single word when three words in a row will do.

Once more going it alone, Marie Baumer has written out a killer-diller in which the killing is made manifest beneath your very eyes and the dilling, as it were, is left pretty much to your imagination. As far as this not-too-particular member of the journalistic Jukes family is concerned, there is a heavy hint dropped early in the second act that gives away even the outcome of "Little Brown Jug."

From, say, 10 o'clock on, in the late Mr. Beck's Byzantine theatrical bazaar, there is nothing much to do but sit around and watch the playwright steer her course along a zigzag line of action which is far from being the shortest distance between two points.

• • •

Exit Ira

As perhaps the only playgoer in the initial audience who has not known "Little Brown Jug" in manuscript, it is easy to imagine that this post-"Jeb" offering in farthest W. 45th st. is better read than heard. There is a bookish air about it that seems suited to a library rather than to an auditorium. In a library, at any rate, the visualization of Ira would be solely up to you.

Ira, let me tell you, is one of those soft-spoken hard-guys beloved of killer-diller story-tellers. Acting like a mouse while looking like a man, the soft-spoken hard-guy at the Martin Beck is a rat of impurest ray serene. Boy, is he a dastard!

Right at the beginning of Miss Baumer's hair-and-curtain raiser, Ira, peeping out from beneath a sheet in Henry Barlow's combined lodge and boat house way down East in Maine, witnesses the drunkenness, the slapping and the death of Mr. Barlow under circumstances that can be twisted into murder. They are twisted into murder by Ira and his co-operating playwright.

What, during the four scenes and ten weeks that follow, does happen is the pinning of the killing on the late Henry Barlow's mother-in-law and the unpinning of the killing by the late Henry Barlow's long-lost brother. Then, exit the irritating Ira!

• • •

Enter Percy

Few first-nighters will agree when I come out and say that I'm sure "Little Brown Jug" would be a more believable play, that Ira would be a more believable character, in the hands of some actor other than Percy Kilbride. Remembering his moony monkey-business in "George Washington Slept Here," "Post Road" and "Cookoos on the Hearth," I am still of the opinion that his Ira is too funny to be fearsome.

His Ira being all wrong in both conception and execution, nothing is there to motivate the groveling reactions of Irene Haskell and her daughter Carol to his fantastic attempts at blackmail. Either would have laughed him down at the rising of the curtain.

That neither does laugh him down is not the fault of the Katherine Alexander who plays Mama Irene or the Marjorie Lord who plays her offspring, Carol. They, not Mr. Kilbride, are what the playwright ordered. Ronald Alexander indulges in an impressive now-you-see-me-now-you-don't performance as the drunken, slapped and finally defunct Henry Barlow. And you will like Arthur Franz as Carol's boy-friend.

But, well into the second stanza, it is Arthur Margetson who takes the Marie Baumer concoction over. From then on, his Norman Barlow dominates the scenes... But, by and large, "Little Brown Jug" means no more to the audience than the song of the same title means to the story.

New York Post

MARCH 7, 1946

Percy Kilbride a Fiend In 'Little Brown Jug'

By VERNON RICE

I had hoped that I could be the Horowitz of the typewriter, after the opening of "Little Brown Jug." Nothing but sweet chords and mellow phrases did I want to pound out. But, alas, some discordant notes will have to come forth.

Marie Baumer's play, which Courtney Burr presented at the Martin Beck, is a psychological thriller, and it has the same difficulty so many plays of its kind have—that of making the audience accept its initial premise.

She had third act trouble, too. Miss Baumer wasn't able to explain clearly the motives of her antagonist. Not to me, anyway.

The playwright did create just about as fine a fiend as has been seen on the stage for some time, and Percy Kilbride, abandoning comedy for the time being, played him to the hilt.

A Fiend in the Home

But why did Irene Haskell take this creature, Ira, into her home in the first place?

Granted that he was in the cabin in Maine the night she went with her daughter to plead with her son-in-law to grant her offspring a divorce. It is true, also, that he saw her slap the young man with such force that he was knocked out of the window onto a boating pier and was killed.

He didn't convince me, as easily as he did her, though, that the police would not believe the truth; that the death was accidental. She appeared to be quite an intelligent woman, too.

Convince her he did, however, and also that he was a very good gardener. Ira persuaded Irene to take him to Connecticut to live in her home and work in her garden. Once there he really takes over. Neither she nor her daughter nor her daughter's fiance has a moment's peace. He not only takes over the garden but their entire house and lives.

It was the dead man's brother, recently returned from England, who saw through him and got rid of him.

An Acting Vehicle

If Miss Baumer didn't write a very good play, she did provide Percy Kilbride with an excellent vehicle in which to sport his versatile acting wares. Mr. Kilbride has always been one of our best character actors, but generally he has been called on to be nothing more than quaint and homey. In "Little Brown Jug" Mr. Kilbride wins my nomination, hands down, for the horror man of the season.

Katharine Alexander, with all her poise, restraint and charm, almost succeeded in making the unconvincingly written Irene Haskell convincing. She had the thankless task of having long moments on the stage with nothing to do but to register fright and terror, and it is to her credit that these moments were made believable.

Marjorie Lord, as her daughter, and Arthur Margetson, playing the dead man's brother, offered able support.

It is Percy Kilbride's evening, though, and it's good to welcome him home again after so long a sojourn in Hollywood. It is even better to discover all this talent that has been hidden for so long.

It is too bad they couldn't have been rediscovered in a better play.

"Truckline Cafe"

The Sun

FEBRUARY 28, 1946

'Truckline Cafe' Is a Hopelessly Jumbled Play, Its Author Badly Off Form.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

Another big-name playwright now meets complete defeat in a season that has been rough on prestige. "Truckline Cafe," written by Maxwell Anderson, and presented last evening at the Belasco, is a hopelessly artificial and muddled play, a curious and lumbering mixture of comedy, melodrama and philosophy.

There are enough actors upon the Belasco stage to put on "A Grand Army Man" all over again and there were many moments last night when I wished they had been doing it. "Truckline Cafe" has too many characters, too many incidents, too little play. It goes in for broad and clumsy comedy and in its more pretentious interludes it becomes downright unbearable.

The author of "Winterset" and "High Tor," now badly off form, writes of young people whose lives and marriages have been disrupted by the war—of their emotional confusions, infidelities, recriminations and new resolves. In doing so he has failed to give reality to his characters, he has cluttered his play with many that are extraneous, and he has placed too much dependence upon the devices of coincidence.

The scene of "Truckline Cafe" is a highway diner, located between Los Angeles and San Francisco. The principal character, Anne, is working as a waitress in the oceanside cafe. When she came to believe that her R. A. F. husband was dead she turned to drink—and to other men. When she discovers that he is alive, and almost at her doorstep, it is her impulse to run away. The flyer, who has become the father of a child born to a Polish slave girl after his escape from the Nazi prison camp, appears at the cafe and attempts to effect a reunion. Anne refuses. But after she has witnessed the despair of a G. I., another overnight-cabin guest at the diner, who has just murdered his young wife for confessed infidelity, Anne relents and makes the decision to try to rebuild her marriage.

Virginia Gilmore plays the waitress, tortured with self-condemnation. Miss Gilmore is a capable and appealing young actress and she does all that is possible to bring naturalness to a character who is made to do and say strange things. June Walker and Ralph Theadore, generally an unerring character actor, give some believability to their performances as the woman and man from Idaho who run the busy establishment on the highway. There is an effective performance from Marion Brando as the young wife-murderer and some engaging moments from a child actor, Eugene Steiner. Richard Waring is quite lost as the flyer, returned from the dead, who comes to reclaim his wife.

Harold Clurman and Elia Kazan have presented the play in association with the Playwrights' Company. Clurman did the staging. A fine realistic setting has been contributed by Boris Aronson. But it's wasted.

"Truckline Cafe" is long on atmosphere and off-stage effects and short on anything even approaching sound playwriting. It is third-rate Anderson.

'TRUCKLINE CAFE.'

Play by Maxwell Anderson; directed by Harold Clurman; setting by Boris Aronson; costumes by Millia Davenport; presented by Harold Clurman and Elia Kazan, in association with the Playwrights' Company, at the Belasco Theater, Wednesday evening, February 27, 1946. The cast:

Toby	Frank Overton
Kip	Ralph Theadore
Stew	John Sweet
Maurice	Kevin McCarthy
Min	June Walker
Wing Commander Hern	David Manners
Anne	Virginia Gilmore
Stag	Karl Malden
Angie	Irene Dailey
Celesta	Joanna True
Patrolman Gray	Robert Simon
Evvie Garrett	Joana Dolan
Hutch	Kenneth Tobey
Matt	Louis A. Florence
June	Jutta Wolf
Sissie	Leila Ernst
Tory McRae	Ann Shepherd
Sage McRae	Marion Brando
Man With a Pail	Lou Gilbert
The Broadman	Peter Hobbs
Janet	Peggy Meredith
Mildred	June March
Bimi	Richard Paul
Tuffy Garrett	Eugene Steiner
First Man	Rolan Hayes
First Woman	Lorraine Kirby
Mort	Richard Waring
Second Man	Joseph Adams
Second Woman	Rose Steiner
First Girl	Ann Morgan
Second Girl	Gloria Stroock

SYNOPSIS: Interior of a diner cafe on the ocean highway between Los Angeles and San Francisco. Act I—After dark. Act II—Toward eleven next morning. Act III—After eleven that evening.

New York World-Telegram

FEBRUARY 28, 1946

By Burton Rascoe

Anderson in 'Truckline Cafe' Writes an Agony Column

In "Truckline Cafe," which opened at the Belasco last night, Maxwell Anderson sets up shop as counsellor on domestic relations to returned veterans and the young wives they left behind them when they went away to the wars. I have heard more interesting —and much more poignant—cases adjudicated over the commercial radio than the several exploited on the stage last night and none with the fixed idea and facile solution with which Mr. Anderson handled every instance of maladjustment.

It appears to be Mr. Anderson's conviction that every young couple should have arranged to have a child before the husband left for overseas. With this tie between them, he implies with repetitious emphasis, there would have been no discord on a husband's return. All wives and husband's would have remained faithful through the years of separation, no matter how hasty or ill-considered were their nuptials; and there would have been none of the instances of schisophrenia, dementia and murder, which Mr. Anderson has paraded before us as pathetic examples.

Cafe an Odd Place.

The scene of Mr. Anderson's demonstration of postwar problems and their solution is a roadside restaurant on the ocean highway between Los Angeles and San Francisco. As staged by Harold Clurman in a set by Boris Aronson, this restaurant is a curious place where everybody orders chili and coffee and nobody eats or drinks anything. As soon as they are served coffee or chili (invariably without crackers, bread or water) they start talking and then walk out. There must have been 40 orders of chili and coffee served last night that nobody took a sip of.

A mysterious girl (Virginia Gilmore), of obvious gentility and deeply distraught, shows up at the cafe seeking forgetfulness as a hard-working waitress. Her husband (Richard Waring) has been reported dead after a bombing mission. In her grief she had abandoned herself to drink and to the arms of numerous men. When she learned her husband was alive, she procured an abortion of a child by one of her fleeting comforters, crossed the country and sought to hide her identity.

Story of the Play.

The husband, working in an airplane factory only 20 miles away from the cafe ever since his discharge, locates her and learns all about her past misconduct through a British intelligence officer. He begs her to return to him, confessing meanwhile that he has with him a child he begot upon a Polish girl (who was later shot by the Nazis) when they were both being hunted by the Germans.

She reviles him for not giving her a child before he left, so that she might have had something to preserve her sanity, and at first refuses to mother the child of another. At the final curtain he has convinced her that the past should be blotted out with all the other horrors of war and that they should begin life anew.

Meanwhile, another wife, left without a baby, has become a tramp in her husband's absence. On an island in the central Pacific, a replacement from the States describes to the husband in detail a girl and the overnight cabin, with whom, and wherein, he had had many nights of pleasure. The husband, upon his return, seeks out his wife, takes her to the cabin he knows in detail, forces her to confess and shoots her to death.

Indifferently Acted.

As a recurrent contrast and pointer-up of the moral is the example of a war bride who had a child by her husband before he left for overseas and is therefore faithful, cheerful and a constant comfort to her absent husband. Unhappily for the full effect of the moral, she is presented as good-hearted but moronic and burdened with a badly brought-up brat.

Except for a brief bit by Marlon Brando as the former soldier who blew his top, an amusing characterization of a drunken sailor on the prowl by Karl Malden, and competent performances by June Walker and Kevin McCarthy, the acting was indifferently bad, Miss Gilmore being especially cold, though pretty.

Journal American

FEBRUARY 28, 1946

Offer 'Truckline Cafe' At Belasco Theatre

By ROBERT GARLAND

Thirty-one characters are in search of an author up on the stage of the Belasco Theatre. Even before the curtain rises on "Truckline Cafe," Maxwell Anderson has walked out on all of them. And this pretentious playwright, who deliberately takes a powder, ought to know better than to concoct a setting full of Morts, Sages and Kips, Annes, Sissies and Mins, only to desert them on Broadway's doorstep.

Nevertheless, having concocted a setting full of Morts, Sages and Kips, Annes, Sissies and Mins, not to mention Tobys, Stews and Matts, Angies, Junes and Janets, Maxwell Anderson does desert them on Broadway's doorstep. From shortly before nine until shortly after eleven, these 31 characters in search of an author feel sorry for themselves in the decorative diner designed by Boris Aronson.

Left to their own devices by a playwright who has no use for them, they make their entrances and exits with neither rhyme nor reason, speaking their pieces with neither rhyme nor reason, either, kissing, cursing, killing one another as if their lives were a dream dreamed by an idiot, full of offstage sound and fury, signifying nothing. Everything is for the worst in the worst of all possible worlds of make-believe.

In "Truckline Cafe," Maxwell Anderson's 31 characters are as unhappy as their play is long. And that is long and unhappy, even for Mr. Anderson. Longer and unhappier than, say, his "Journey to Jerusalem."

◉ ◉ ◉

Woe Is Them!

Early in the enervating evening at the Belasco Theatre, Playwright Anderson has one of his 31 abandoned characters point out that, in this atomic age, an optimist is any person with an uncertainty as to the future of mankind. In "Truckline Cafe", Maxwell Anderson is certainly no Pollyanna. Neither are his on-stage Broadway orphans. They are as pessimistic as their creator. And equally confused!

Especially pessimistic and confused are Anne and Mort who, in no manner of speaking, are hero and heroine of the play. In a sort of Enoch Arden situation, with all sorts of unsavory complications added, they relate their soiled and sordid story while, in and about the diner, other soiled and sordid stories are related simultaneously. Woe is them! Oh woe is them, indeed!

Not only are Anne and Mort bewitched, bothered and bewildered Tory and Sage are bewitched, bothered and bewildered, too. So bewitched, bothered and bewildered are they that Sage fires 10 consecutive bullets into Tory's erring body before he pauses to permit that erring body to be washed out to sea and himself to be handed over to the California law. And Min and Kip, owners of cafe, are b., b. and b-ed, too.

You would think that a playwright of Maxwell Anderson's standing—and Mr. Anderson has a standing, if not too high with me!—would come rushing to his characters' rescue. Of such pity he has none.

◉ ◉ ◉

Bit-Players

Owing to one thing and another —mostly to the playwright who takes a powder—"Truckline Cafe" is a bit-player's fiesta. From curtain rise to curtain fall, from act to act, from episode to episode, the characters in search of an author show up in twos and threes to indulge in a spell of ardent acting. And, with no dramatist to guide them, they are forever doing better than Mr. Anderson deserves.

After playing Frankie to Ann Shepherd's Johnnie, Marlon Brando has himself a high old actorial time before giving himself up to Robert Simon pretending to be a California cop. A graduate of the role of Nels in "I Remember Mama," young Mr. Brando distinguishes himself in this, his second professional part. And Miss Shepherd is to be mentioned meritoriously as the Tory who loves well, but not too wisely.

As Anne, Virginia Gilmore is as pretty as a picture. And as two dimensional, Richard Waring is more than the neglectful playwright ordered as Mort, the would-be Enoch Arden of "Truckline Cafe." June Walker and Ralph Theadore are Min and Kip.

owners of the daffy diner in which the daffy diners carry on. They, old timers that they are, make up the minds of Mr. Anderson's characters as they go along.

Discouraging as Maxwell Anderson's "Truckline Cafe" may be, it is even more discouraging when you stop to realize that this is the poor and unrewarding play that drove the rich and rewarding "Home of the Brave" out of the Belasco Theatre.

PM

MARCH 1, 1946

—*Kronenberger*

Poor Service, Wretched Food

PM Reviews

The war undoubtedly did a great many things to a great many marriages, and Maxwell Anderson is considering the postwar consequences in *Truckline Cafe*. To give himself plenty of scope, he has set his scene in a diner along a California highway. Virtually anyone can come into a diner, and here virtually anyone does. Many homely and humorous touches can round out such a picture—or at least fatten up a skinny plot. And a diner, of course—like a hotel or a department store or a ship—can serve as a nice pocket-size edition of the universe, a sort of Cafe Cosmos.

There is something pretty facile, something theatrically pretty familiar about all this; but I don't know that it need have turned out to be anything like the disaster it is. Mr. Anderson has gummed things up as only some one can who shows neither real skill nor a saving slickness, who has lost both a sense of the truth and a feeling for his trade. He has not only made mincemeat of reality; he has made mincemeat of melodrama. He has cluttered the stage with minor characters who have almost as little to contribute in the way of flavor as they have in the way of story. He has not only been foiled by life, he has been foiled by language. In their big scenes, his people talk as people simply don't.

Beyond his footloose fliers, his drunken sailors, his floosies and waiting wives, Mr. Anderson has introduced two couples whose lives are a direct invitation to drama. One of the wives has cheated during the war and been found out, and when her young husband is sure of his facts he kills her and carries her body out to sea. The other wife, believing her husband dead, had taken a lover; when she learned that her husband was alive, she fled both men and became a waitress in the diner. The husband catches up with her, to confess that he has been unfaithful, too, and to urge that they make a fresh start. But the girl insists that things are smashed beyond repair; and it takes the tragedy of the other couple, and her husband's analysis of guilt-emotions, to bring her round.

This is Mr. Anderson's major story, and it becomes Mr. Anderson's major mess. For his conception of it seems as high-flown as his treatment; granting all the urgency of guilty feelings, the girl—without ever being portrayed as a self-dramatizing person—seems to have dramatized the situation past all common sense and modern behavior. In any case, Mr. Anderson has hopelessly overwritten it, as he has overwritten his more melodramatic tale. The marital dislocations produced by the war are a sound subject for a topical play. But Mr. Anderson has given his the feel of trash rather than truth, and the quality of very old-fashioned theater.

I doubt whether the production could make any decisive difference with such a play; in any case, it hasn't. Mr. Clurman's staging has probably made things less dull, but has certainly not made them less foolish. Virginia Gilmore, Karl Malden, Ralph Theadore, June Walker, David Manners and others give a professional enough account of themselves; and as the young murderer, Marlon Brando is quite effective in a difficult emotional scene. —LOUIS KRONENBERGER

New York Post

FEBRUARY 28, 1946

'Truckline Cafe' a Confused Study of Post-War Period

By VERNON RICE

Maxwell Anderson's latest offering, "Truckline Cafe," has so many good bits that it is unfortunate to have to report that the sum total of the whole of what went on last night at the Belasco equals a confused study of the post-war period.

It's a "Grand Hotel" in a roadside cafe between Los Angeles and San Francisco, a "Street Scene" on the highways, a "Counsellor-at-Law" in a juke joint with adjoining cabins, that Harold Clurman and Elia Kazan presented in association with the Playwrights' Company.

Life comes and goes. Mr. Anderson just stands on the sidelines and observes.

What concerns the playwright most is our readjustment to our post-war transition period and he tells us to face things as they are and go on; not to try to go back to what they were before the war.

A good enough theme and excellent advice.

If Anderson had a plot, however, that was as good as his theme and if his main characters were as good as most of his minor ones he would have had a first-rate play.

As it is, "Truckline Cafe" is one of those almost-but-not-quite works.

Love Interests Him

Mr. Anderson's main interest is the love story of a girl who, upon hearing that her husband has been killed in the war, goes to pieces and takes to doing things no nice girl should. She is about to have a baby whose father was her companion at the time she learned that her husband isn't dead, so she has an abortion instead and runs away to work in the Truckline Cafe.

We meet her there at the time a young British flying officer is trying to intercede for the husband. No go.

Later the Britisher brings the husband, and even after he tells of his underground experiences with a Polish girl and the subsequent result, she is still afraid to go back to him.

Not until she listens to a confession of a young war-husband, who brought his wife back to the cabins attached to the cafe so that he might shoot her at the scene of her unfaithfulness, does the girl see the light and go back to her abandoned mate.

Neglects Main Characters

Strange as it may seem, even before the play actually gets going, Mr. Anderson becomes so interested in the people he has wandering in and out of the place of his action, he neglects his main characters and his story to concentrate on them.

There is an amusing scene with a drunken, philosophic sailor, who turns up with two girls; a touching moment offered by an ex-GI who can't forget his on-the-make manners; a heart-breaking long distance telephone conversation a young mother and her sleepy five-year-old son have with a husband and father in Honolulu; the frantic, tragic seconds the young husband and his faithless wife have together, and later the violently stirring confession of the boy after he has killed his wife—these things stand out.

Clurman a Traffic Cop

Harold Clurman, as director as well as a multiple producer, was able to act as traffic cop for the multitude of characters that entered and exited through Boris Aronson's realistic set, highlighting each scene and wringing from it all its possible worth.

He wasn't able, however, to do much about Virginia Gilmore, who played the leading role. Of course, Mr. Anderson didn't help her in the writing of the part, and this time charm and good looks could not make up for lack of experience.

Richard Waring, as her husband, though receiving no more aid from the playwright, was able to make his role seemingly believable as was David Manners playing the British wing commander.

But long after they and the play are forgotten we shall remember Kevin McCarthy as the ex-GI with the roving hands and mind; June Walker as Min, the practical wife of the cafe owner; Karl Malden's drunken sailor, Joann Dolan reading a letter from her husband in Honolulu and later talking to him long distance, Louis A. Florence recalling his singular distinction of being the millionth soldier to enter Germany and the poignant playing of Ann Shepherd and Marlon Brando as the ill-fated husband and wife.

They shall be remembered and the scenes in which they played.

Unquestionably, that is just as well.

Wilella Waldorf, The Post's drama critic, is ill.